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THE GREAT STEP

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THE GREAT STEP

Maitland Alexander

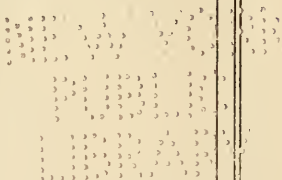
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Alexander

THE GREAT STEP

BY

MAITLAND ALEXANDER

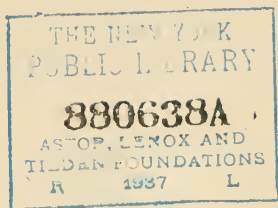


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ALCOCK
JAMES
WAGGELL

To

M. L. A.

For her interest, appreciation and loving
sympathy in all my work

FOREWORD

THIS little book has been prepared especially for my own congregation, that those who unite with the Church may have a clear apprehension of the importance of the step which they are taking, and that those who have been Christians for a longer time may be helped in their preparation to worthily partake of the Lord's Supper. I have ventured to print several prayers, more as suggestions than as forms to be used. I have appended a number of condensed sacramental addresses for devotional reading before Communion. I hope that in addition to its work among my own people it may be a help to pastors and sessions in their responsible task of receiving into the visible Church such as shall "Confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus."

DARK HARBOR, MAINE, *August*, 1915.

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I

THE GREAT STEP

THERE is no more important step or any greater crisis in the life of any one than that act which we have come to call "joining the church." That this is not fully realized is often due to the fact that the Church is considered a human institution, made and conducted by men, with many faults and some inconsistencies. But the act becomes important when one considers the process which admits us to the Church and the convictions and beliefs which induce us to ask for admission to the Church. For this act of "joining the church" is only the outward sign of great convictions which have come to us through careful thinking, and a sincere faith in the facts of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and in His teachings. It means a readjustment of our whole life and atti-

tude, and any act involving this is always a tremendously important step in the individual's career.

If you become a Christian it means that you are emerging from the shadows of an uncertain position and an equivocal attitude regarding Jesus Christ and His Gospel into an avowed position and an unhesitating obedience to Him and His commandments. You are no longer to live in the land of the undecided, but you are to be a witness before the tribunal of the world concerning the things which you believe and profess about Jesus Christ. You are about to cross a line hitherto uncrossed by you, which involves a complete change in your ideals, standards and motives. You are about to surrender an old allegiance never to resume it. From the day when you become a professing Christian, "Old things have passed away; behold all things have become new . . . and all things are of God."

It is no wonder then that there are those who pause and question as to their action

and its meaning. Let me state as clearly as I can the meaning of this important step.

When you unite with the Church and publicly profess your faith, you are making a public avowal of that which has been a most secret and personal experience between you and Jesus Christ. The steps which led up to that experience began with a knowledge of certain historical facts. These facts are embodied in the Gospel and are a narrative of the life of Christ. You have come to know the facts regarding His birth, His life, His death on the cross and His resurrection. You have also learned the *meaning* of these events and have studied the teachings of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. You have heard from His own lips that He came into the world to save sinners. That He came to reveal to men the love of God for them. That He died to make salvation possible for all who by faith received Him. He has declared that sin is hateful to Him and ruinous to the sinner. The heart of the

Gospel is that Calvary and all its scenes is sufficient atonement for human sin. The terms of salvation have been declared; namely, that a simple faith in Him saves to the uttermost. You have listened to His gracious invitations, "Come unto Me," "Believe on Me," "Follow Me," "Abide in Me."

With this knowledge the question has naturally arisen, "*Do I believe these things?*" You have doubtless believed them as history, but you have not believed them with the faith that brings devotion to the Person of Christ or obedience to His will and commandment.

Then, too, the conditions and needs of your own soul have created a longing in your heart that you might have a new and a better life. The accusations of your conscience have made you seek some escape from sin. Christ's personality has made a deep impression on you and the satisfaction of soul that comes through the acceptance of the Christian life and which you have seen in others has made you long for the

pardon which comes alone through His precious blood, the peace derived from His living presence, the hope born of His resurrection, and that power that is the product of His continual intercession. Thus far you look with favour on His claims and long perhaps that the benefits of His Kingdom might be yours.

This knowledge and your own need has led you to the point of decision. Are you willing to comply with the conditions of acceptance? You will be compelled to translate your faith from the realm of intellectual assent to the facts and teachings of the Gospel, to the realm of the *assent of obedience*. You must decide whether you will accept or reject Jesus Christ as your Saviour. This decision must be made by you alone. It is an act of your will. If you decide to avail yourself of the offer of the Gospel you will say literally or in effect:

“I take Jesus Christ as my all-sufficient Saviour. I cast myself in loving dependence on Him. I accept His gracious

sacrifice for me. I plead His precious blood as the only ground of my hope, and the only plea which I can make before a righteous God. I promise as His sinful but loving disciple to obey Him implicitly and confess His name before men."

So doing you have taken *the great step*. It is this faith and this decision for Him and the public confession of Him that is the ground for your admission to the Church. The outward surroundings of your life are unchanged. . You will probably go to school as before, with the same teachers and companions. You will probably engage in the same profession or business as before, with the same partners and associates or fellow employees. You will live in the same home with the familiar faces of your family surrounding you. None of these things will be changed, *but you will be changed*.

You are now a self-confessed follower of Jesus Christ, a humble but sincere disciple of the Son of God. You are His by that faith in Him which will not be denied.

You are His by the public avowal of that faith which you desire to make. You are His by the solemn pledge which you give Him in which you promise to be His disciple. Henceforth you are not your own master but His humble servant. You are to be obedient not to your own will but His. The promises which you made to Him are sealed in His broken body and shed blood. Could any relationship be more sacred, more binding, or more impossible to break?

Each succeeding Communion only makes more solemn, more binding, this act of yours, and though it brings greater joy and power through each succeeding Sacrament, it also lays upon you ever increasing responsibility.

II

THE GREAT EXPERIENCE

IT would be an incredible thing that the assumption of such a responsibility as that of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and confessing Him before men, involving as it does a radical change in our whole attitude towards life, should be without some experience of divine grace. The results must surely mean joy or sorrow, peace or storm, satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Yet no one can write of the religious experience of another's soul. No one should have the temerity to unveil that sacred meeting between the sinner and his Saving Lord. No other eye or ear has a right to see or hear that interchange of confidence between the sinner and his Saviour, or the broken confession of his

unworthiness, or the Lord's absolution to His restored child.

The days of pronounced religious experience seem past; we are not taught to look for it. It is not demanded as it once was, that part of the evidence of being a child of God was to have had "Experience." We are afraid of emotion, of the resulting action born of our feelings, and so we go to the other extreme and pass by that inner witness, the sense of forgiven sin testifying to us that we are born again and are the children of God.

But the Bible clearly promises those who believe and those who repent and those who confess the Lord Jesus Christ an experience rich in its assurance and joy and peace. This experience ought to be a mighty witness to the truth of your religion. If you are thirsty and drink of a spring, you have the experience of having your thirst quenched, and are assured of the refreshing character of the spring. When a child is tired or hurt or troubled and seeks refuge in its mother's arms it is

entitled to and receives the experience of her love, comfort and help. The man who at the hands of a skilful surgeon is relieved of almost unbearable pain is entitled to and receives the experience of real rest and peace. Therefore it is impossible that there should not come an experience within ourselves that is the result of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, there is the experience of the loving reception of the repentant sinner by Christ. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." This produces a peace of conscience hitherto unknown, because our sins have been forgiven. There is a sense of the Saviour's love and power exercised in our behalf which gives a serenity and a peace that cannot be disturbed or broken. There is a contentment born of the living companionship of the Lord which banishes loneliness and gives a great and abiding joy. There is also the assurance of perfect safety in the day of judgment because of the atonement of Jesus, which robs death

of its terror and lets a celestial light shine on our daily life.

Then, too, there are the new experiences which we have as students of the word of God. The Bible becomes for us an individual book. There we find pictures of our own life, our own needs, are there portrayed and its truths and promises are made as if for us individually. We cannot do without it. Its study becomes not only a joy but also a necessity to us.

Prayer takes on a new importance to us. It is translated into the very breath of our spiritual life. Our every care now demands prayer. Our plans, our fears, our griefs, our hopes, our sins, all demand that communication with our Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through these prayers we come to know the truth of that word, "If ye abide in Me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

We are also aware by the experience of our own hearts that the burden of sin has been lifted and that the power of the

adversary has been broken. Our old doubts are gone as well, and our fears for the future have taken flight. Life is the same, but so very different when pervaded by the presence of the God of all grace.

It is these experiences of the Christian life that make us confess our faith, which give us our most convincing proof for the things which we believe, and which constitute our best defence against all the assaults of unbelief. "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." "The Spirit also beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God."

III

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

IN partaking of this Sacrament you have before you a great privilege. The Sacred Rite or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, established by Jesus Himself, is to be celebrated and you by virtue of your love and devotion to Him are invited.

The feast is simple, yet filled with an overwhelming meaning. The elements are simple, bread and wine, and yet they embody the most important truth known to man.

Christians meet and sit together. Bread is broken and all partake of it. It signifies to those who know the truth and who believe it that Christ's body was broken and His life given for those who receive salvation at His hand. "This is My body

broken for you, this do in remembrance of Me."

Wine is poured out, of which all partake. It signifies to those who know the peace of forgiven sin through the blood of the cross that Christ's blood was poured out that He might "Redeem us to God by His blood," and make full atonement, bearing in our stead the penalty of our sin and the sin of the whole world. "This cup is the New Testament in my blood shed for many for the remission of sin."

This we do in remembrance of the Lord Jesus, that His cross may never be forgotten by those who have been saved by it. This we do that His disciples may meet in loving communion with their risen Lord, with the central thought of His love to us declared in His sufferings and death on the cross uppermost in our minds.

It is here also that His disciples may pledge themselves to Him, to His service and to His Kingdom for ever.

With this meaning attached it is out of the question to think of the Communion as

an incidental thing in our lives. It is a most solemn and serious service. It can easily be turned into a stumbling block by those who regard it lightly.

Who shall come to the Lord's table? No one ought to come to the Lord's table who does not love Christ simply and sincerely. No one ought to come who does not repent of his sin with that repentance which involves the forsaking of it. No one ought to come who does not believe in the great fact that Christ died for and instead of him, thus reconciling him to God.

But on the other hand, if there are those who have sinned against the light they have, who have fallen from their profession and practice, but who cry "God be merciful to me a sinner," and who hate the sin that made them fall, *these may come*, nay, ought to come. There are those who stay away from the table of the Lord because they feel themselves unworthy, or who fear lest they may be eating and drinking judgment to themselves. Any sinner may stand

before the cross, no matter what his sin or weakness or failure, and see the body of the Lord broken and the blood of the Lord shed and in trembling faith appropriate the efficacy and power of the atonement. Shall the symbol be greater than the reality? Therefore, the Communion table is not barred to repentant sinners, even as the cross of Christ is available to those that desire to approach it.

IV

PREPARATION FOR THE COMMUNION

THAT men may worthily partake of the Lord's Supper there should be careful and earnest preparation for it. This preparation is not for morbid self-examination or introspection, but that you may know the state of mind in which you come. That you may know the facts of the death of Christ and the meaning of that transcendent sacrifice, and know as best you may how to avail yourself of the presence of the Lord Jesus in the Communion, that your soul may grow thereby.

Preparation should be made first by a careful reading of the following or similar passages from the Bible:

Psalms 51.	Luke 23:33-49.	John 19.
Isaiah 53.	John 3.	Romans 8:31-39.
Matthew 16:24-28.	John 6:53-59.	I Corinthians 11:23-29.
Matthew 19:27-30.	John 10:7-16.	II Corinthians 4.
Matthew 26:17-30.	John 14.	Hebrews 12.
Matthew 26:36-46.	John 15.	I Peter 1.

Preparation should also be made by careful self-examination. This is in order that our own attitude toward sin may be made plain. Are we holding some sin and hiding it? Are we willing, that all our sins should be crucified? Are we more and more living the life commanded by Our Blessed Lord? Is our discipleship true or false? Are we free from the taint of hypocrisy? Are we willing to consecrate ourselves wholly to Him and allow Him to exercise His holy office of King over our lives? Is our intention to serve Him faithfully and work for His Kingdom wherever He may open the way? Have we an altar of sacrifice to Him? What are we willing to lay upon it as the evidence of our love?

One of the best means of preparation is by prayer. As our self-examination reveals our great and many needs we are to ask Him whose salvation we have accepted, in whom is our only hope and help, to make us that which He sees we ought to be by the power of His saving grace.

The following prayers are given to be a guide for those who desire to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion:

PRAYER

“ O Thou Son of God, Redeemer of the world, I am unworthy to sit at Thy Holy Table, yet Thou Thyself hast bid me come. As I contemplate all that it means for me to be a communicant of Thy broken body and shed blood, I am confronted with my sins in all their weakness, unbelief and shame. I am conscious of the fact, that my imperfect life, my heart, my word and works are known to Thee. Thou knowest my weak faith, my imperfect obedience, my neglect of opportunity, my failure in duty. Lord Jesus, as Thou dost know these things, Thou dost also know that I love Thee, that I bewail my faults and weaknesses and long to be like Thee. ‘ Create within me a clean heart and renew within me a right spirit and may the peace of God in my heart tell me that my

sins are forgiven because they are cleansed in Thy most precious blood.' *Amen.*"

PRAYER

"O Blessed Lord, bring me into the Spirit of Calvary. Help me as I come to the Lord's Supper to forget myself and have the vision of the disciples as they saw no man save Jesus only. Let me walk amid the scenes of Thy sufferings that my love may grow, that my heart may be made more tender, that I may see what God thinks of sin, but above all, that I may learn the lesson of Thy Love, immeasurable, boundless, full and free. Put away from my thoughts, aspirations or longings the world, its pleasures, its allurements and inducements to forget God. Make me humble, teachable and willing in the day of Thy power. *Amen.*"

PRAYER

"O Jesus, Master, lead me into the school of Christian discipleship and help me to

learn its lessons with a facility given of the Holy Spirit. Teach me the secret of prevailing prayer. Help me to see with the eyes of faith those things unseen by human eyes. May every experience of my life be an experience of grace as I apply Thy word to each event and govern all things by Thy blessed will. Grant, O Lord, that in partaking of the Sacrament I may feed indeed upon Thy broken body and quicken my life by Thy life in the wine, the emblem of Thy most precious blood, and this through that faith by which hearing and sight spiritual alone can come.
Amen."

V

AS WE SIT AT CHRIST'S TABLE

WHAT then shall be my thought, aspiration and prayer as I come to the moment of Communion and take the bread and wine upon my lips? Just as your preparation for the Communion must be in a measure subjective and full of introspection, so must the moments of the Communion and our thoughts at that time be filled not with self but with the great objective fact of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your poverty of attainment, your doubts and fears, your lack of assurance, your sins even, all must be forgotten, and the whole horizon of your thoughts be filled with Christ. It does not matter what you are, but it matters everything that you shall see Him dying for your sins, dying to declare his love for you, dying that you might have everlasting life, pouring out His blood

that your soul might be made white, rendering the everlasting sacrifice of Calvary that you might share with Him the joys of heaven.

Let your meditation be all of Him.

“I have come to this moment that I may meet the Lord Jesus Christ. I have come to recall Him on the cross, and see His body broken and His blood shed for me. I have come to walk with Him in His paths of suffering and know something of His pains, His agony, His loneliness and His cruel death. In all of this I recognize my Saviour and feel that no sacrifice was ever like His, that no love has ever been declared that could compare with His, and that such a price paid by His life's blood has made me a child of God.”

Let your prayers be prayers of gratitude, of love, of consecration and for those special blessings which you feel that you yourself need.

PRAYER

“ O Lord, Eternal God, Our Heavenly Father, receive my grateful and loving thanks for Thy love declared in Jesus Christ, Thy well beloved Son. For my share in this love I am unspeakably grateful. That I can through the darkness and pain of Calvary see the reconciled face of my Father makes it for me the place of peace. That the precious blood there shed cleanses my soul from sin and gives me victory over temptation, that the love of sin is gone and with it the fear of death and condemnation, that God’s love working through His almighty power is mine and for me, for all of these amazing gifts and mercies my words are too poor to express my gratitude, I can only adoringly worship Thee and marvel at Thine unspeakable gift. *Amen.*”

PRAYER UPON RECEIVING THE BREAD

“O Jesus Saviour, Lamb of God, I remember Thy death. In this bread broken I see by faith Thy body broken, wounded, dying a shameful death that I might have everlasting life. I cannot understand the mystery of God dying for sinners, but I thankfully and with love and wonder receive this gift of Thyself. I take Thee, O Lord Jesus, for my Saviour, I accept with an overwhelming humility what Thou hast done for me. At Thy pierced hands I receive Thy gift of everlasting life. May I ever be worthy of such a sacrifice. *Amen.*”

PRAYER UPON RECEIVING THE WINE

“O Thou Eternal Sacrifice offered on Calvary for me, I remember Thy death. In this poured out wine I behold by faith Thy precious blood shed for many for the remission of sins. It is a price all price beyond. It is a gift of transcendent power. I plunge beneath its tide that my sins may

be washed away; those sins that have grieved Thee; those sins which I have thought lightly of but which have been my condemnation in the sight of God. Lord Jesus, teach me the value of Thy death, may it constrain me to offer myself to Thee; Thou hast bought me, redeemed me, saved me. Lord Jesus, by every resolve of my heart, by every decision of my will, by the power of a loving heart, I give myself to Thee. *Amen.*"

PRAYER OF RENEWAL OF SACRAMENTAL VOWS

"O Lord Jesus Christ, King over my life, I renew my sacramental pledge to Thee. For the failures of the past, for coldness of heart, for following the world instead of Thee, for disobedience to the heavenly vision of Thy providence, for deafness to Thy call, for missed opportunities, for indifference and laziness in the affairs of Thy kingdom, I do most humbly repent. Here at Thy cross I renew my vows to Thee and seek the strength that is

divine, that I may take up with new purpose and endeavour the duties of my Christian discipleship. Help me to say with a true sincerity, 'Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.' May the cross which Thou dost bid me bear be my most precious privilege. Help me then to walk as one of the Children of Light, to pray as one who sees God face to face, to read Thy Word as one who hears in every page the voice of God. Help me to work that I may have crowns to cast at Thy feet when the sacramental host of God's elect shall come to the final coronation of the Lamb. *Amen.*"

PRAYER FOR DEEPER EXPERIENCE

"Blessed Saviour, as I again come to the Sacramental Table, help me to be able to say out of experience that nothing can shake, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' Give me that power of spiritual discrimination that I may always choose those things that please Thee. May the Holy Spirit be

my teacher and guide that my discipleship may not be in name or in form or in confession alone but in power. Help me more and more to see by faith the deeper things of Thy Gospel, may my spiritual sight see vaster and holier prospects to which I may attain. Choose me, Lord, if I be worthy, to greater and greater services in Thy name. If I be faithful, may I be permitted to lift Thy cross higher and higher that more may know its saving power, and let the light of the world shine on me and on my path until it shall merge in the morning of heaven. *Amen.*"

VI

CLIMBING THE HEIGHTS

EACH Communion has always seemed to me to be a resting place in the toilsome ascent that leads to Heaven.

When we make the ascent of some great mountain the halting places where we rest are always one above the other. We climb over a path that is not easy. The joy of a mountaineer's life rests in the difficulties of the ascent. We climb over rocks, beside precipices, sometimes in ice and snow, intent upon the path one step at a time. There are falls and bruises, there are fogs that hide the summit, there is darkness, there are discouragements and wearinesses, until sometimes we are ready to say, "Is it all worth while?"

From time to time our guide says, "Rest here." We lift our eyes from the path that we may look up and down. There

yonder is where we stopped last to rest. How far below it is! We did not realize that we had climbed so far. But how much more wonderful the view is and how much nearer the summit, we are. The very air is touched with a breath from the mountains. What would it have been if, having toiled and worked, we found ourselves only as far as when we began to climb?

There are some Christians who have no greater vision or vista, no greater spiritual attainments than when they began their pilgrimage. Their life is lived always on the same level. Heaven seems no nearer, prayer is no easier, the Bible is no more precious, the ascent seems just as hopeless and discouraging.

Our Communion seasons are our resting places, and also the points when we can pause to measure our ascent. How hard it has been to many. We have had temptations that have been battles, we have had falls that have hurt us. We have had doubts, fears and perplexities that have confused us. Sometimes spiritual things

have been obscured; we have not had time to look up. Sometimes we have felt that we have lost our guide. There have been hard places as well, griefs and cares and injustices, misunderstandings and failures, broken hopes and disappointments. We have been sorely tempted to go back, but we have pressed on. Our ascent has not been rapid, but we have ascended nevertheless; and when our Master, Guide and Friend has bidden us pause and rest for spiritual refreshment along the way, we have lifted our eyes from the path to Him and where He has led us.

Back yonder is our starting point. How far below us it seems! How much we have passed through. How weary we are. But we are on heights above those on which we have ever stood before and all the journey seems worth while to have gained the vision and felt the heavenly breezes. The difficulties of the path have made us know and trust our guide. The temptations of life have made us stronger. Our griefs and trials have given us a mountaineer's clear,

penetrating vision by which we have been able to see through the storm and darkness the face of God.

Each Communion season we should be able to say, "I can pray better than I could. I can interpret the will of God for my life better than I could. My faith is stronger, my victory over sin is easier. Life is sweeter and more heavenly and my rest beside the way has given me purpose and incentive to climb until I reach the final resting place, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven.

VII

CONSTRAINING LOVE

AMID the busy activities of temporal life there is little time to think of spiritual things or of our duty to the Kingdom of Christ. There is a motive for everything that we do, a determining cause that controls our action. We want to be rich, educated, fashionable; we want to be prominent in society, to advance in our profession. Therefore what we do, we do with these purposes in mind. We may not formulate the motive that is behind our business, social and professional life, but it is there. What we spend, how much we study, whom we entertain, the objective we have for our children,—all these things are the product of our constraining motive.

If you should ask me why the spiritual life of some men is unfruitful, why religion is a burden, why the Christian duties are

left undone, why the study of the Bible has no fascination for them, why prayer is hard and the Church is an incident rather than an essential in their lives, I would reply, because there is no constraining power which lays them under a great and lasting obligation. St. Paul discovered the dominant power in Christian service when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth me."

When we deal with a subject such as the length and breadth and depth and height of the Love of Christ we see the impossibility of understanding its fulness. We speak serenely and somewhat carelessly of the love of Christ as something to be taken for granted. But the love of Christ to us is revealed in things that grieve our hearts and shock our insensibility. Christ's love is seen in the stable at Bethlehem when the Eternal Son took upon Him the limitations of our poor humanity. The love of Christ is revealed in the sympathy, tears, grace and help that characterized His earthly life. The love of Christ can be dimly under-

stood in Gethsemane as we see Him bearing the sins of the world. Calvary is the story of love. The thorns and the nails are the pens with which it is written and the shed blood is the guarantee of God to a race of sinners that His love to them broke over the bounds of His love to His only begotten Son and offered His all, that the wandering children of time might have an eternal salvation. As you partake of His broken body and shed blood, do not have a formal, unloving, unemotional attitude toward Him as you say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Three men sat at a table together. They talked of what this man should do and should not do. They discussed their standards of living. They told the forces which were the most compelling in their lives. One man was a lawyer and told of the ideals he had in his profession and the standard which he had set himself and said that the compelling force of his life was to be known as a gentleman and refrain from doing those things which no gentleman should do.

The second, who was a man in financial affairs, noted for his probity and uprightness, told of the love he bore his mother who stood in his life for all that was good. The third was a travelling man who lived the life of such a profession and knew its temptations and its loneliness and its sin. He said, "Jesus Christ saved me from sin by His death, He loved me enough to die for me. His love constrains me to be and do all that I can for Him. I have promised Him and I will keep it."

VIII

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

WHEN I survey the wondrous cross, what I think of it and what I gain from it depends largely on what I am as I approach it and what I feel to be my needs as I see the Saviour hanging upon it.

If you approach the cross of Christ as a technical theologian, interested only in its meaning as a part of a religious system, your survey will only yield you mystery and the significance of the cross will be lost to you.

If you approach the cross as a historian to study the greatest of the martyrs, your survey will only bring you a feeling of pity for the untimely death of a good man.

If you approach the cross as a sociologist

looking upon the death of Christ as the great example of how a good man can die for a reform, your survey will only yield you an ennobling impulse that you cannot equal or imitate.

But if you come to the cross as a sinner asking whether God will have any relationship to you at all; if you come with eyes blind with tears and choking throat and conscience all aflame, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," then you learn by an undeniable experience the power of the cleansing blood and the peace that comes thereby.

When I survey the wondrous cross as a believing and loving disciple of Him who is there crucified, I see in it the indisputable fact that God's love is over me and around me always. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." There are times when afflictions, trials, discouragements and reverses cloud our faith.

Does God love me? The survey of the cross is the answer.

When I survey the wondrous cross I see in it a mighty salvation wrought out by God that His children might be redeemed. Here a great price is paid, here a great freedom is purchased, here a great victory is gained for the humblest and vilest sinner in all the world. Here I see hope for the hypocrite, the drunkard, the thief, the harlot, the proud, the sceptical, the self-righteous pharisee. I see hope for myself with all my sins, for Jesus Christ the Son of God offered Himself in the place of every sinner.

When I survey the wondrous cross I am impelled to acknowledge my responsibility to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the cross that makes real to me His right to my love and service, and in the presence of His sufferings I make again and again a surrender of myself and pray that He will entrust me to bear His cross to others.

IX

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

THE Lord is my Shepherd. Through all the years men have been lifted by these words out of the strife of life with its monotony, loneliness, cares, responsibilities, griefs and fears and tears. They are far away in a moment from the noise and turmoil of the world, and enter wonderingly into "The secret place of the Most High." The Lord is my Shepherd. There never was a sentence which depended so much upon its pronoun. *My* Shepherd. Then we are all the sheep of God's pasture. Erring sheep it may be; wandering sheep perhaps, foolish sheep, but belonging to God. Until, however, we can say "My Shepherd," we are in the wilderness, a prey to the ravening wolves of sin.

What a calm confidence is begotten of the Shepherd's care. How we rest in that

assurance that our life is continually under His all-seeing eye. "I shall not want" because He is my Shepherd. The green pastures of His grace and the still waters of His peace are mine. There may be storm round about me, but the depth of His peace may be mine, made possible by the "Blood of the Cross."

I am dishevelled, weary, starving and discouraged. "He restoreth my soul." His strong hands support me. His comfort reassures me. His touch heals me. The music of His voice gives me a song in my heart. The wounds of sin are healed by the Shepherd. The tears of grief are wiped away by His loving touch. My weakness is made strength again by His everlasting arms.

I am safe, too, amid the perplexities of the ways of the world. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." In the darkness the star of Bethlehem guides me until I feel His hand leading me and His right hand upholding me. I will follow now but one pathway, that

on which I see the prints of His own footsteps. I see but one prospect, the Heavenly Home whither my feet are turned. I have but one aim—to walk in His ways and do His will.

Life at best is short and at the end the valley. The valley of the shadows has become under the Shepherd's care the valley of the morning, for down the mountains between the two peaks of time and eternity has come the sun of righteousness, driving away fear and darkness and doubt and loneliness. "Thou art with me." "O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory." "If death should triumph he would slay both the Saint and God."

But the wonder of the Shepherd's care and love cannot be reached in the Shepherd's psalm. We must go down the years until we come to the Cross. Who is it dying there? Who is thirsty, worn and in agony? Who is pierced with the thorns of the wilderness? Who is in darkness? Who enters alone the valley of the shadow of death? It is the Shepherd. "The Good

Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.” It is thus that we are entitled to all the blessings of the fold. The still waters, the spread table, the sun in the valley are only possible for us because Christ died for us. We behold the dying Shepherd, dying that the sheep might be safe. From that cross and suffering we hear the voice of the Son of God, raised against the foes of His sheep, uttering that word of triumph which is a rock and refuge and fold to all the pilgrims of the night, “My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand.”

X

A GREAT WAY OFF

IF our Christian life could be maintained at its highest point, if there were no days of coldness of heart, no hours when we longed for the far country, no moments when we gave rein to our sins, the parable of the Far Country need never have been written. We all, however, are conscious when the time comes for us to renew our vows to God that we have a great way to return that we may stand in the relation of one who abides always in the Father's House. There are men of business who have drifted away by reason of their business methods and practice, there are those who have succumbed to the temptations of their social life, there are those who have separated themselves from God because they have not forgiven those who have trespassed against them. There

are those who have been untruthful and malicious and unkind, and full of the wickedness of temper. There are those who have cherished unholy thoughts in their minds and fed their appetites on their evil imaginations, there may even be some who have grossly sinned.

Again the sacramental season comes with its call to the cross. Men stand wondering what they shall do. They are not worthy to sit at the table of the Lord. Their lives have been lived amid husks. Yet they are soul hungry. They long for a sight of the face of God. They would like to return but they are afraid of being thought to be hypocrites.

I venture to ask you to think of your intention and resolve as far as your future life is concerned. You cannot eat the father's bread and live in the Far Country. You cannot serve God and your own sinful heart. You cannot say, "Send me the bread and let me drink the wine among the swine." If, however, your will becomes obedient to the call of conscience; if your

feet rise and your steps turn away from sin to God; if your plea of penitence is upon your lips, "I have sinned"; then return. "For when he was a great way off his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."

I stood on the shore of a fishing village one day while the boats were out and a rising storm blackened the water with its ever increasing flaws of wind. The sea, which had been calm, was rising and along the beach the old men and women watched for the returning boats. One by one they came running before the gathering storm and strong hands seized them and dragged them high up, on the beach. At last all had returned but one which was manned by two brothers. They had not returned, and as the afternoon grew later and the darkness began to gather, man after man left the beach and went to his own house. At last all were gone but one old man who stared with strained eyes through the twilight. He was the father of the two who had not returned. He was deeply anxious.

The scud began to run in great streamers across the leaden sky and the surf had begun to dash with all the malignity of a stormy ocean. Suddenly he cried, "I see them, I see them." I could not see them. I looked and looked and thought that his wish gave him the sight for which he longed. But after many minutes their boat could be seen returning and in through the surf they ran on the top of a heavy sea. The old man said little, but when breathless they came up to him, he said, "I saw you when you were a long way off."

It is marvelous what the eyes of love can see. God sees *you*. The longings of your heart are known to Him. I bid you in His name arise and return from that point in the great circumference of His vision where your sins have carried you and at the Cross of His dear Son confess your sin and abide in His house forever.

XI

SIN REVEALED AT THE CROSS

THE sins of the Christian life are nowhere more evident to the sinner than in the presence of the Cross of Christ. In that searching light we see what we are and what we have done in the light of eternal love.

Sin at any time is terrible, but nowhere more terrible than when we stand before the Sin-Bearer of the world. Sin in one who is not a Christian is a dreadful thing, but how much more dreadful in one for whom every sin is an offence against a crucified Saviour. We sin and the world goes on and either does not notice or does not care. We sin and there is apparently no penalty attached to the sin. We sin and soon forget it. But when the Christian sins it is an act directly hostile to the Son of God. We make the Holy Sacrifice of

Calvary of none effect. We wound Him who was pierced with the nails in His hands and feet, in His heart, the seat of His affection and love for us. The Bible says we "Crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame."

At the Communion table we let the light of God's love shine in on our life. We are in the presence of the world's greatest sacrifice, which has been made for all men, but individually for us. How hateful our life seems to us in the presence of the price of sin. Faithlessness, disobedience, impurity of thought and life, envy, malice, lying, sins of business, sins of social life, sins of temper and hatred, all seem directed against Him who died to break in us the power of sin and atone for sin by giving His life. Like the lepers of old, we cry, "Unclean, Unclean."

But the light of Divine Love that reveals our sin reveals as well the path of forgiveness. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Simon Peter grieved the loving heart of his Master and under the very shadow of the cross let Him die without a word of sympathy or comfort or love. But while Calvary revealed to Peter the depth of his own sin, it also melted his heart, destroyed his self-assurance and complacency, and fanned his love into a living flame. The humble confession, "Thou knowest that I love Thee," spoke more than all of the knowledge Peter had found beneath the cross of Jesus, of himself and his sin and the redeeming love of the Son of God.

Let us then in coming to the Lord's table nail our sins to His cross. Let us uproot with His help and by His grace the destroying elements in our lives. Let us quench the flames of sin in the waters of Calvary's saving stream and let Christ and His love so fill us that there shall be no room save for Him.

XII

THE WATER OF THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM

DAVID lay sorely beset, harassed and troubled on the heights of Bethlehem and cried, "O that one would give me to drink of the water of the well at Bethlehem." It was the well at the city's gate at which he had as a boy drunk again and again. To him the water of that old well was associated with memories which were among the most precious things of his life. Since that time he had drunk at many springs and from great and wonderful fountains. He had held the golden cups of the king to his thirsty lips. But nothing would take the place of the well of his early years. Years when God was near, when "The Lord was his Shepherd"; years when he looked up into the stars and

saw the face of God; years when he was good and pure and undefiled and unsoiled with the stains of travel and pursuit. Days that were passed but which had left a soul hunger and thirst which only the well of Bethlehem could satisfy.

We have all longed for the days of our spiritual past. We remember with longing the days when we knew experimentally the Love of Christ, the Peace of God, the joy of service and the forgiveness of the cross. We are tired and discouraged now, the strife of the journey, the pursuit of gain, the bitter waters of sin make us long for the water of the well of Bethlehem. We wish that we could pray as we used to pray. We long for the sense of Jesus' companionship that we once enjoyed. We wish that we had not stained our garments in the mire of the road. We are coming perhaps to the Communion table with the longing for the better and holier days strong upon us. We long as Jacob must have longed in the years of his later life for another glimpse of the heavenly ladder

and the sound of the voice of a covenant making God.

As we turn to prepare ourselves for another Communion our hearts are heavy with the futility of our longings in the face of the failures of the past. It seems perhaps to be mockery to us.

It is with great assurance that I bid you realize that as the three mighty men in David's host broke through the Philistine line and brought him the water of the well of Bethlehem, so there is one who can bring us again the springs of a lost spirituality and cause to spring forth in us a well of water to everlasting life.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the well of water that we need and long for. He has lost none of His refreshing qualities during the days or months or years through which we have not drunk of His life-giving power. He invites, nay urges, us to come again to the fountain of life. He bids you thrust down the cup of your trembling faith into the eternal spring and drink.

Men and women who have lost their touch

on Jesus Christ may find Him at His table. If you are truly longing for a spiritual blessing and spiritual power and a personal contact with Jesus the Saviour of men, He meets you there and lo as you meet Him the years of dissatisfaction and disobedience and worldliness are gone and you live again as in the days when the Cross first laid on you its constraining power and Christ's Blood washed all your sins away. This is one of the great privileges of Christ's Table. Let us therefore come boldly, that we may find grace to help us in this time of our need.

XIII

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST

THIS phrase means much to the redeemed sinner as he approaches the Table of the Lord's Supper. If the Cross means anything it means the shedding of the Saviour's blood for the sinner's life. It means the price paid in the work of the sinner's redemption. It means that the word used signifies the life of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. There are those who would take offence at the idea of shed blood, poured out blood, a life given for a life when it is in terms of Christ and His cross. But there is nothing repulsive about the blood given for the life of a child.

In the field hospitals many a woman unable to fight has given her blood to help in the recovery of a soldier and there has

been no criticism. There is nothing in all the world as sacred as the precious blood. But the realization of sin enables us to realize the value of the Blood of Christ. Where there is no sense, of sin there is no need for a remedy like the Blood. "A self-palliating iniquity may be cleansed by water. But when the soul is thrust down into hell by the burden of sin, when the mercy of God is clouded by our own iniquity, when we are undone, lost, condemned, then we can believe only in the power and efficacy of the sacrificial blood, the cleansing blood, the precious blood of Christ."

The precious blood of Christ is the measure of God's love to me. I can measure it in the world of nature on days when the flowers bloom and the sun shines. I can measure it in terms of His providence when I have bread to eat and clothes to wear and friends and joys. But I cannot measure its length or breadth or depth or height except by the precious blood. I cannot compute its saving power when I

think that it is the Blood of the Son of God given for me. Do I know that He loves me? There are days when I feel that I am undone, that the world is cruel, that the face of God is hidden, that grief is my master, that sorrow is the largest ingredient in my cup. Then I remember Christ's dying love, the gift of Himself, the pouring out of His blood, and I am compelled to believe that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers can separate me from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Love so amazing, so divine,

“Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

The precious blood of Christ is the fountain of immortality. It binds all Heaven with its many mansions to throngs of sinners who stand about the Cross. It is the mark upon the foreheads of those who sing the song of the Lamb. We can just as well think of Heaven without Christ as to think of it without the precious blood. The blood is remembered when we shall

see the Lamb on His throne. The blood is known when we see the garments of those who have washed in its crimson tide. The blood can never be forgotten through all the ages of eternity as the redeemed sing their song of triumph, "Unto Him that hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

What then shall be for us the meaning of the sacramental cup as we shall partake of the wine, the symbol of His precious blood. It is the price paid for us. It is the method of redemption made by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the most touching appeal that love can make. As we feel our sins forgiven, as we know the peace of the assurance of Salvation, as we hope and long for Heaven, we are compelled to say with new emphasis, "The precious blood of Christ." Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.

XIV

THE END OF THE DAY

THERE is nothing more beautiful than the declining day except the dawn. Behind my summer home where I write lie those beautiful hills of Maine that come down like giants to drink of the waters of the ocean. Their feet are bathed in that glorious bay that opens out into the sea. On a clear evening the sunsets are wonderful things. The wind dies and the colours of the setting sun change and soften the water of the sea and make the mountains stand clear-cut against the sky and speak of rest and peace and solidarity. Even this dies away and at length amid the gray and green of the darkening sky there shines the quiet beauty of the evening star. As it grows darker still we enter the harbour and see the lights of the little village come out one by one. We anchor and furl

the sail and at length we climb the little hill to one particular light which means home for us. There we receive the welcome always waiting. There we see again the children's faces. Night has come, but with it has come rest and peace and fellowship and love, and always yonder stand the great hills, dim, obscure in the night, but there abiding until the beauty of the new day shall cover them with an almost fadeless glory.

There are those who come to the evening of the day of their life and cross the sea toward home. For those who can see the eternal hills there is no repining. For those whose faith discerns the evening star there is no fear. For those who can behold beauty in the dying day there is that peace that passeth all understanding. There have been fogs and storms and rough waves, but these are passed. Let us look at the hills. They stand as the eternal verities of life, and God, and His providence and care. They are emblematic of the unchanging character of His love, they stand as the

Cross stands above the storm, they are present as Jesus is present. The ocean of life changes, the truths of life abide. It is providential that the glows and colours of the evening are evident in the end of life. The softness and mellowness of a character tried out, the vision that the young never see because it is the product of age, lends great beauty to everything because the eyes that see are the eyes of faith. If it grows dark the evening star is shining. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The lights of the harbour come at last and the knowledge of what lies there fills our hearts with joy. The ties that aged men and women have in Heaven are many and close and one of the prospects of the Heavenly Home is that reunion which awaits those who live by faith in the Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them.

O then what happy greetings on Canaan's happy shore
What knitting sundered friendships up where partings are
no more.
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle which brimmed with tears
of late,
Orphans no longer fatherless nor widows desolate.

We sit down at the Table of the Lamb slain and we remember those who are aged. Some of them sit with us. It is a foretaste for them of that heavenly feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, and the day that is coming, the glory of which may already be seen by some, is a day where there is no night, no parting, no pain, no tears, no death—a day of perpetual sunrise.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR A COMMUNICANTS' CLASS

1. What is meant by the phrase "Joining the Church"?

Ans. To join the church is an act whereby we are received into the visible church on the ground of our Faith in Christ and our obedience to His will and commandments.

2. Of what is it the outward sign?

Ans. It is the outward sign of repentance toward God and Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Does "Joining the Church" make us a Christian?

Ans. No, but it is outward sign of our having become a Christian.

4. Is joining the church necessary to becoming a Christian?

Ans. No, but it is the Christian's first duty.

5. Is one's public position altered on becoming a Christian?

Ans. Yes, in our avowed relation to Jesus Christ and in our public attitude toward Him before the world.

6. What great inward change is involved?

Ans. We now are Christ's having His spirit, His standard of obedience, His aims, His definite purpose, summed up in the word "Discipleship."

7. What public avowal do we make in joining the church?

Ans. We avow that repenting from our sins and accepting Jesus Christ as our only Saviour, we will surrender ourselves in loving obedience to His will.

8. What knowledge is necessary to uniting with the church?

Ans. 1. A knowledge of the fundamental facts of the life of Christ.

Ans. 2. A general knowledge of His teachings regarding sin, and the way of salvation as contained in the Word of God.

Ans. 3. A knowledge of the principles

of the Christian life as Jesus Christ has declared them.

9. What does Christ teach as to the meaning of His coming into the world?

Ans. John iii:16. John xiv:6. John x:11. Matthew xx:28.

10. What is the heart of the Gospel?

Ans. The heart of the Gospel is the death of Christ for and instead of the sinner.

11. What is Faith in Christ?

Ans. Faith is the acceptance as true of the facts of His life and His teachings, a resting upon Him alone for salvation, and is shown by a loving obedience to Him in all things and a changed heart.

12. What is the difference between believing with the head and with the heart?

Ans. In the former we may take as true the facts and teachings of the Gospel without their having any bearing on our life or conduct.

In the latter we receive and rest upon them alone for salvation and therefore we love Him and obey Him.

13. What is the test of true faith?

Ans. Obedience.

14. Why is a public profession of our Faith in Christ necessary?

Ans. Romans x: 9. ,

15. Does becoming a Christian involve any religious experience?

Ans. It does. It involves a sense of forgiven sin. A great desire to please Christ. A love of His word and of prayer. A desire to serve Him in any way that lies in our power or His.

16. Have we a right to say "I know I am saved"?

Ans. We have that right if we are earnest and sincere in our profession and if we are desirous of doing His will; if we rely on Him alone for salvation, then the assurance which He gives is ours. John x: 27-28.

17. What great blessings does the Bible promise to those who accept Jesus Christ and become His disciples?

Ans. Romans x: 9. .John x: 1-5. John xv: 7. John xiv: 27.

18. What is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

Ans. A sacred ordinance, instituted by Christ in memory of His death, wherein by faith we partake of bread and wine, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, receiving thereby nourishment and strength for our spiritual life.

19. Who instituted the Lord's Supper?

Ans. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper on the night in which He was betrayed.

20. What are the elements used?

Ans. The elements used are bread and wine.

21. What does the bread signify?

Ans. The bread signifies that Christ's body was broken on the cross for us and for our salvation.

22. What does the wine signify?

Ans. The blood of Christ shed on the cross for the remission of sin.

23. When we say "In remembrance of Me," what do we mean?

Ans. We mean that we are always to keep in mind that Christ is our only Saviour. That He died in our place and stead and that we owe Him our love and implicit obedience.

24. Is the Communion a matter of great importance?

Ans. It is the most important religious service of our Christian life.

25. Are there those who should not come to the Communion?

Ans. No one should come to the Communion who does not repent of his sins, does not love the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and who does not long to follow Him as Master and Lord.

26. Why should we prepare ourselves for the Communion?

Ans. Because we are told to do so in the Bible. I Corinthians xi:28.

27. How may we prepare?

Ans. By examining ourselves regarding our faith and life. By reading the narrative of the death of Christ. By earnest prayer in which we bewail our shortcom-

ings and seek earnestly to be what Christ would have us be.

28. What should be our thoughts on coming to the Lord's Table?

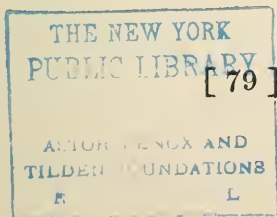
Ans. At the Table of the Lord our thoughts should be of Jesus only. His love, His death for us. His power to make us good. His comfort, help and grace. Nothing of self, all of Him.

29. For what ought we to pray at the Lord's Table?

Ans. We should be thankful for His great sacrifice. Repentant for our many sins. We should consecrate ourselves afresh to His services, and renew our sacramental covenants.

30. Ought we to seek to progress spiritually from Communion to Communion?

(For answer study chapter on "Climbing the Heights.")



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